

Dear Chair Cummings and other Committee Members

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak today and all of your hard work and focus on our behalf. I wanted to follow up on one point made by Hunter Thompson about the use of cellular to provide internet access. As I mentioned, our local telecom company, Waitsfield Com, has made a significant investment in providing fiber to all of the homes and businesses in the Mad River Valley. This, in turn, enables both wifi calling and much faster and more effective and secure internet service than is possible over a cellular network. Tom Wheeler was the FCC Chairman when the Telecom Act of 1996 was promulgated and he has also led the CTIA. As such, he has been a long-time advocate for the cellular industry. But even he recognizes that fiber is a far more effective means of providing internet connectivity than cell networks as evidenced by his testimony on this point to Congress in 2019. I have attached that presentation with the relevant provisions highlighted. The point this suggests is that the easy path to solving for any digital divide in Vermont might appear to be to foster a denser cell network (with all of the associated negative aesthetic and health impacts) and the cell companies will certainly support that as it is in their economic interest. But if we really want to ensure that all of our residents have adequate internet access, over reliance on cell towers is not the answer and you all should encourage the PUC to formulate a better longer term plan for solving this problem.

Best

John